

# AL-QA'IDA'S FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN IRAQ

A FIRST LOOK AT THE SINJAR RECORDS



HARMONY PROJECT

COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER  
AT WEST POINT

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## AUTHORS' NOTE

*Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* is the latest in a series of reports from the Combating Terrorism Center drawing on newly released information from captured al-Qa'ida documents maintained in the Defense Department's Harmony Data Base. The report is a preliminary analysis of records containing background information on foreign fighters entering Iraq via Syria over the last year. The data used in this report was coded from English translations of these records and undoubtedly contains some inaccuracies due to imprecise translation as well as through errors in the transcription process. The CTC plans further studies based on the Sinjar Records and expects to hone and improve the accuracy of our database as we do so.

The authors thank James Phillips, CTC Harmony Project Manager, for significant assistance coordinating and compiling the information and documents as well as CTC Staff members Sherwet Witherington, Vahid Brown, and Warren Polensky for their research and editorial support. We also thank Colonel Mike Meese and Colonel Cindy Jebb-Head and Deputy Head of the US Military Academy Department of Social Sciences- for their continued support of the CTC's Harmony Project.

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not reflect the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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## Introduction

On December 4, 2007 Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, the reputed Emir of al-Qa'ida's Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), claimed that his organization was almost purely Iraqi, containing only 200 foreign fighters.<sup>1</sup> Twelve days later, on December 16, 2007, Ayman al-Zawahiri urged Sunnis in Iraq to unite behind the ISI. Both statements are part of al-Qa'ida's ongoing struggle to appeal to Iraqis, many of whom resent the ISI's foreign leadership and its desire to impose strict Islamic law.

In November 2007, received the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point nearly 700 records of foreign nationals that entered Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007. The data compiled and analyzed in this report is drawn from these personnel records, which was collected by al-Qa'ida's Iraqi affiliates, first the Mujahidin Shura Council (MSC) and then the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). The records contain varying levels of information on each fighter, but often include the fighter's country of origin, hometown, age, occupation, the name of the fighter's recruiter, and even the route the fighter took to Iraq. The records were captured by coalition forces in October 2007 in a raid near Sinjar, along Iraq's Syrian border. Although there is some ambiguity in the data, it is likely that all of the fighters listed in the Sinjar Records crossed into Iraq from Syria. The Sinjar Records' existence was first reported by The New York Times' Richard Oppel, who was provided a partial summary of the data.<sup>2</sup>

The Combating Terrorism Center is pleased to make the Sinjar Records publicly available for the first time. English translations of the Records can be accessed at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/FF-Bios-Trans.pdf> and the records in their original Arabic text at [http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/Foreign\\_Fighter\\_Bios-Orig.pdf](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/Foreign_Fighter_Bios-Orig.pdf).<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this initial assessment of the Sinjar Records is to provide scholars access to this unique data, in the hope that their scholarship will complement—and compete—with our own. The CTC plans a more comprehensive study on Iraq's foreign fighters for release in early 2008.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, *For the Scum Disappears Like Froth Cast Out*, posted to [www.muslim.net](http://www.muslim.net) on December 4, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Oppel, "Foreign Fighters in Iraq Are Tied to Allies of the U.S.," *The New York Times*, November 22, 2007, online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/22/world/middleeast/22fighters.html>

<sup>3</sup> Information recorded from these documents and used to generate the summary statistics is available in spread sheet form on request. Please send request for this data to [ctcharmony@usma.edu](mailto:ctcharmony@usma.edu)

<sup>4</sup> For access to all captured documents released to the CTC and the CTC's previous reports incorporating this information see: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony>

The CTC has not altered the Sinjar Records except to format them in a more user-friendly manner for distribution. The CTC cannot vouch for the authenticity or accuracy of these records, except to confirm they were authorized for release by the U.S government, which is why these records are presented in their entirety. The CTC does not redact or classify information.

Readers should be aware that analyzing data captured on a battlefield is fraught with risk. Some of the personnel records were filled out incompletely or improperly, some may have been lost by al-Qa'ida's personnel in Iraq, and some may have been accidentally lost or destroyed by U.S. forces. The Sinjar Records are an astounding testimony to al-Qa'ida's importation of fighters to Iraq, but they are an inherently imperfect record. Readers and researchers should be wary of conclusions drawn solely on the basis of these records.

## Background

Al-Qa'ida's allies began moving into Iraq even before U.S. forces entered the country in early 2003. After fleeing Afghanistan and traversing Iran, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi slipped into Northern Iraq some time in 2002. At that time, Zarqawi's organization was called *Tawhid wa'l Jihad* (Monotheism and Struggle) and was built around a backbone of Jordanians, Syrians, and Kurds that either rushed to join him in Iraq or had been working with the Kurdistan-based jihadi group, Ansar al-Islam.

Zarqawi did not join al-Qa'ida until October 2004, when he swore allegiance to Usama bin Ladin. The new organization was called *Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* which was commonly known in the West as al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI). The agreement between Zarqawi and his new masters belied important disagreements that remained even after Zarqawi formally joined al-Qa'ida. Zarqawi was sometimes critical of al-Qa'ida's willingness to cooperate with "apostates" against other enemies and, unlike Bin Ladin, fervently argued that al-Qa'ida's "Near Enemy" — apostates and the Shi'a — were more dangerous than its "Far Enemy" — the United States and the West.<sup>5</sup>

Al-Qa'ida in Iraq worked hard to recruit Iraqis and build cordial relationships with nationalist and Ba'athist insurgents in Iraq, but its brutal tactics and

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<sup>5</sup> For more on these and other disagreements within al-Qa'ida's leadership see the CTC's recent Harmony report, *Cracks in the Foundation: Leadership Schisms Within al-Qa'ida 1989-2006* at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/aq3.asp>

religious conservatism alienated more Iraqis than it attracted. In January 2006, after bloody battles with nationalist insurgent groups and Zarqawi's ill-fated attack on three hotels in Amman, Jordan, AQI subsumed itself within an umbrella group called *Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin* (Mujahidin Shura Council—MSC). Al-Qa'ida in Iraq still existed, but the MSC was a useful way to give AQI a conciliatory—and Iraqi—face. Zarqawi was a tremendously successful propagandist, but his wanton violence was increasingly controversial among Iraqis suffering the ravages of civil war. Meanwhile, the MSC was ostensibly led by Abdullah Rashid al-Baghdadi, a name that implies the man was Iraqi.

After Zarqawi's death in June 2006, AQI quickly replaced him with Abu Hamzah al-Muhajir, a man the United States identified as an Egyptian named Abu Ayyub al-Masri. The Sinjar Records begin shortly thereafter, and many are documented on MSC letterhead.

In October 2006, al-Muhajir announced the formation of the *Dawlat al-'Iraq al-Islamiyya* (Islamic State of Iraq—ISI), and named Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, another purported Iraqi, its Emir. Like the MSC, the ISI was designed to put an Iraqi face on al-Qa'ida's efforts in the insurgency, but the new organization was intended to be much more substantive than its predecessor. Unlike the MSC, the ISI totally supplanted its constituent organizations. For its followers, al-Qa'ida no longer exists in Iraq, only the ISI.

The ISI was meant to unify resistance to U.S. occupation, inspire support from al-Qa'ida's global supporters by imposing Islamic law, and ensure that al-Qa'ida was prepared in case of a precipitous U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Today, the ISI bolsters its religious authority by releasing religious instructions to followers and has created a facade of governance by establishing a cabinet that even includes a Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Despite these efforts, the ISI was poorly conceived and is largely failing. As the ISI tried to impose order, it alienated the Iraqi population and other Sunni insurgents; meanwhile its weakness has left it unable to credibly provide security for Iraqis or impose the religious strictures expected by al-Qa'ida's global supporters. The U.S. spokesman in Baghdad, General Kevin Bergner, even claimed to have intelligence that Abu Umar al-Baghdadi is a fictitious character created to front the ISI while non-Iraqis pulled the strings.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dean Yates, "Senior Qaeda Figure in Iraq a Myth: U.S. Military," *Reuters*, July 18, 2007, online at <http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSL1820065720070718?sp=true>

The sheer magnitude of fighters listed in the Sinjar Records challenges Abu Umar al-Baghdadi's reassurances that his organization is built on a local foundation. Although the records are not necessarily inconsistent with his claim that there are only 200 foreign fighters left in Iraq, the scope of al-Qa'ida's program to import fighters to Iraq belies his effort to convince Iraqis that the ISI is an inherently Iraqi organization. There is no doubt that al-Qa'ida's Iraqi affiliates successfully recruited many Iraqis, but the leadership of both the MSC and the ISI remain largely foreign. Thus, the Sinjar Records exemplify al-Qa'ida's fundamental strategic challenge in Iraq: melding the ideological demands of its global constituency with the practical concerns of relatively secular Iraqis.

Most of Iraq's militants do not suffer that strategic problem. The vast majority of militants in Iraq have nothing to do with al-Qa'ida, and they are focused on Iraqi problems: security, distribution of power and money, and sectarianism. Those insurgents are a mix of Sunni nationalists, Ba'thists, Shi'a militias, and Islamist organizations. Mistaking any of these groups for al-Qa'ida is not simply wrong, it is dangerous.

The ISI's political failure should not obscure the fact that Iraq has inspired thousands of young men from around the world to join al-Qa'ida's cause. The Sinjar Records are important not just for what they tell us about al-Qa'ida's affiliates inside of Iraq, but also for what they reveal about its logistical and recruiting capabilities outside. This analysis will explore some of those dynamics. As stated above, the CTC will return to the subject in early 2008. We offer this data and preliminary analysis now in the hope that other researchers will offer their own insights into the strengths and weaknesses of al-Qa'ida.

## **Description of the Data**

The CTC received a cache of more than 700 records from USSOCOM. After eliminating blanks and duplicates, the CTC examined 606 translated records of fighters that, we believe, entered Iraq via the Syrian border. These records contained varying amounts of detail on the fighters' personal background, group affiliation, travel to Syria, and intended role in Iraq. Some records had considerably more detail than others.



## Combating Terrorism Center at West Point

Figure 1 and Figure 2 below are examples of a typical record in this sample in both original Arabic and in English translation. Readers may note spelling mistakes in the original and translated versions, and varying transliterations.

*Figure 1: Sample Record in Original Arabic*



استمارة شخصية

شجرة المجاهدين

الاسم	تركي بن عبدالعزيز بن إبراهيم
الكنية	أبو الوليد
اللقب	الجزيرة - حي السويدي
الهواتف	أخوه 0502029449 المنزل 4256145
الموالم	4-10 - 1406 هـ
المنسق	يعقوب
المهنة في بلد	
العمل	مقاتل
الأمانات	جواز - 500 ريال - ساعة
تاريخ الدخول	3- شوال - 1427 هـ
طريق الدخول	أبو حمد
التوزيع	أبو خالد
وصايا الأخ	1-
	2-
	3-
	4-
	5-

*Figure 2: Translated Sample Record*

Document Number: NMEC-2007-657689  
Type of Translation: Full  
Date Completed: 15 September 2007

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[The Mujahidin Shura Council]

### Personal Information Form

Name:	Turky Bin-'Abd-al-'Aziz Bin-Ibrahim
Alias:	Abu-al-Walid
Address:	Saudi Arabia, al-Suwaydi neighborhood
Phone Numbers:	home 4256145 His brother: 0502029449
Date of Birth:	22 DEC 1985
Coordinator:	Ya'uqib
Occupation in Homeland:	
Duty:	fighter
Items Entrusted:	Passport - 500 Riyal and a watch
Date of Entry :	25 OCT 2006
Route of Entry:	Abu-Hamad
Assigned to:	Abu-Hamad
Last Will and Testament:	
1-	
2-	
3-	
4-	
5-	

Border Administrative Official  
Shahin

## Initial Findings

### Country of Origin

Saudi Arabia was by far the most common nationality of the fighters' in this sample; 41% (244) of the 595 records that included the fighter's nationality indicated they were of Saudi Arabian origin.<sup>7</sup>

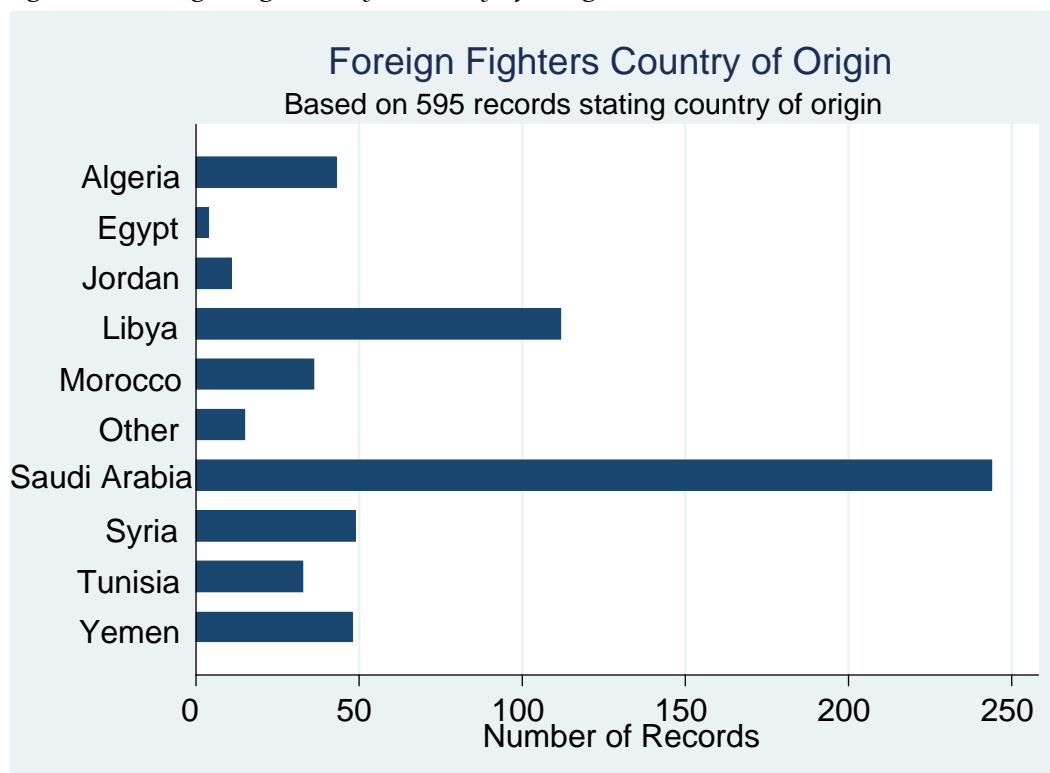
Libya was the next most common country of origin, with 18.8% (112) of the fighters listing their nationality stating they hailed from Libya. Syria, Yemen,

<sup>7</sup> After recording and comparing the information contained in the translated records, the CTC determined that 34 records were likely duplicates of the same individual. These records were deleted from the sample studied.



and Algeria were the next most common origin countries with 8.2% (49), 8.1% (48), and 7.2% (43), respectively. Moroccans accounted for 6.1% (36) of the records and Jordanians 1.9% (11).<sup>8</sup>

*Figure 3: Foreign Fighters by Country of Origin*



The obvious discrepancy between previous studies of Iraqi foreign fighters and the Sinjar Records is the percentage of Libyan fighters. (See Appendix 1 for a brief summary of previous foreign fighter studies.) No previous study has indicated that more than 4 percent of fighters were Libyan. Indeed, a June 2005 report by NBC quoted a U.S. government source indicating that Libya did not make a top ten list of origin nationalities for foreign fighters in Iraq.<sup>9</sup> As late as July 15, 2007, the Los Angeles Times cited a U.S. Army source reporting that only 10 percent of all foreign fighters in Iraq hailed from North Africa.<sup>10</sup> The Sinjar Records suggest that number is much higher. Almost 19 percent of the fighters in the Sinjar Records came from Libya alone. Furthermore, Libya contributed far

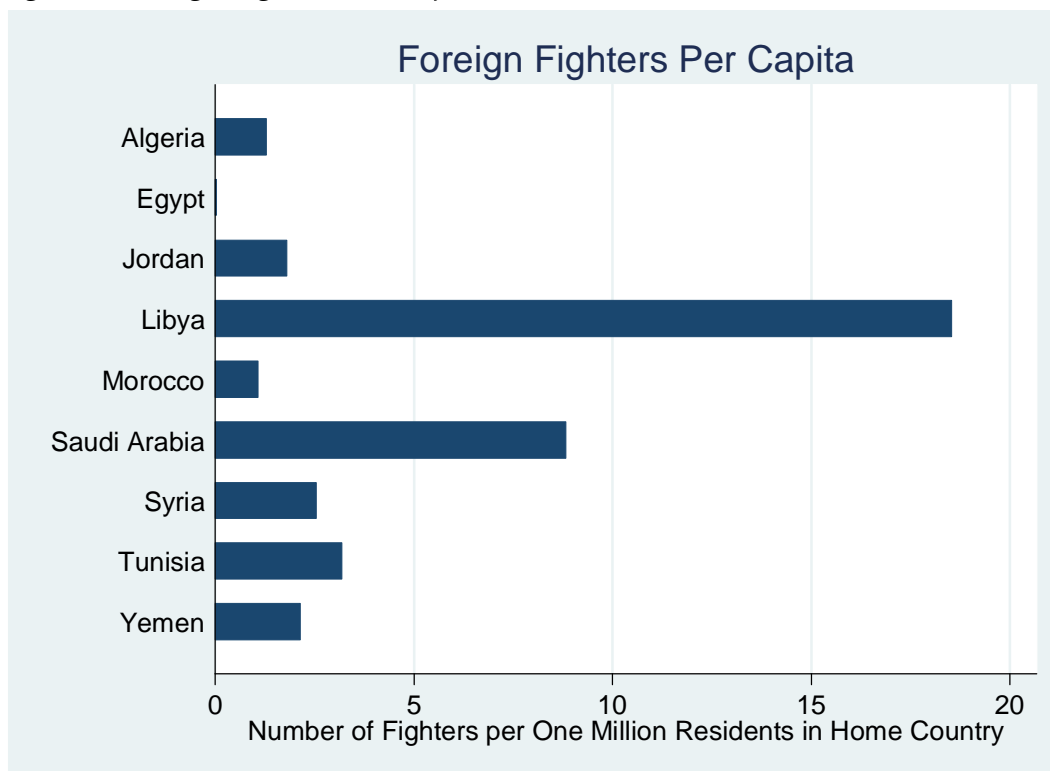
<sup>8</sup> The “Other” category included two fighters from France and one fighter each from Bosnia, Belgium, England, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Oman, Sudan and Sweden.

<sup>9</sup> Lisa Meyers, “Who are the Foreign Fighters?” *MSNBC*, June 20, 2005, online at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8293410/>

<sup>10</sup> Ned Parker, “Saudis Role in Iraq Insurgency Outlined,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2007, online at <http://fairuse.100webcustomers.com/fairenough/latimesA98.html>

more fighters per capita than any other nationality in the Sinjar Records, including Saudi Arabia.

*Figure 4: Foreign Fighters Per Capita*



The previous reports may have collectively understated the Libyan contribution to the fight in Iraq, but the relative synchronization of earlier analyses suggests that the pattern of immigration to Iraq has simply shifted over time. In an admittedly small sample, 76.9% (30) of the 39 Libyans that listed their arrival date in Iraq entered the country between May and July 2007, which may indicate a spring “surge” of Libyan recruits to Iraq. If the numbers cited by the Los Angeles Times in July 2007 are any indication, even the U.S. Army may have underestimated the Libyan contingent in Iraq.

The apparent surge in Libyan recruits traveling to Iraq may be linked the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group’s (LIFG) increasingly cooperative relationship with al-Qa’ida, which culminated in the LIFG officially joining al-Qa’ida on November 3, 2007.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *As-Sahab* video released November 3, 2007, on the Al-Boraq Islamic Network; see OSC FEA20071104393586

In March 2007, the LIFG's senior ideologue, Abu Yahya al-Libi, weighed in on al-Qa'ida's controversial declaration of an Islamic State of Iraq. Although jihadis globally were divided over the strategic wisdom and religious acceptability of declaring the state, Abu Yahya called for unity in Iraq, and encouraged "mujahidin" everywhere to support the ISI:

...our brothers are in need of the backing and aid of the Muslim peoples, with their bodies and wealth, with shelter and prayer, and with incitement.... There is no way to establish and preserve states other than Jihad in the Path of Allah and Jihad alone....This is the path, and anything else is from the whispers of Satan.<sup>12</sup>

Whether there was a spring 2007 Libyan surge or not, the Libyan pipeline to Iraq seems firmly established. The vast majority (84.2%) of Libyans that recorded their route to Iraq arrived via the same pathway running through Egypt and then by air to Syria. This recruiting and logistics network is likely tied to LIFG, which has long ties (not all positive) with Egyptian and Algerian Islamist groups.

The announcement that LIFG had officially sworn allegiance to al-Qa'ida was long-expected by observers of the group. Both the ideologue Abu Yahya al-Libi and the military leader Abu Layth al-Libi have long histories with the LIFG, and are increasingly prominent figures along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and in al-Qa'ida's propaganda. Abu Layth is now an operational commander in Afghanistan; and in 2007, Abu Yahya is second only to Ayman al-Zawahiri as the most visible figure in al-Qa'ida's propaganda.<sup>13</sup> The increasing prominence of LIFG figures in al-Qa'ida's high command may be a function of the group's logistics capacity, including its now demonstrated ability to move people effectively around the Middle East, including to Iraq.

### **City/Town of Origin**

Of 591 records that included the country of origin of the fighters, 440 also contained information on the home city/town the fighters hailed from. The most common cities that the fighters called home were Darnah, Libya and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with 52 and 51 fighters respectively. Darnah, with a population just over 80,000 compared to Riyadh's 4.3 million, has far and away the largest per capita number of fighters in the Sinjar records. The next most common hometowns- in real terms- listed in the Sinjar records were Mecca (43), Beghazi

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<sup>12</sup> Abu Yahya al-Libi, *Iraq Between Stages, Conspiratorial Intrigue*, Al Firdaws Jihadist Forums on March 22, 2007

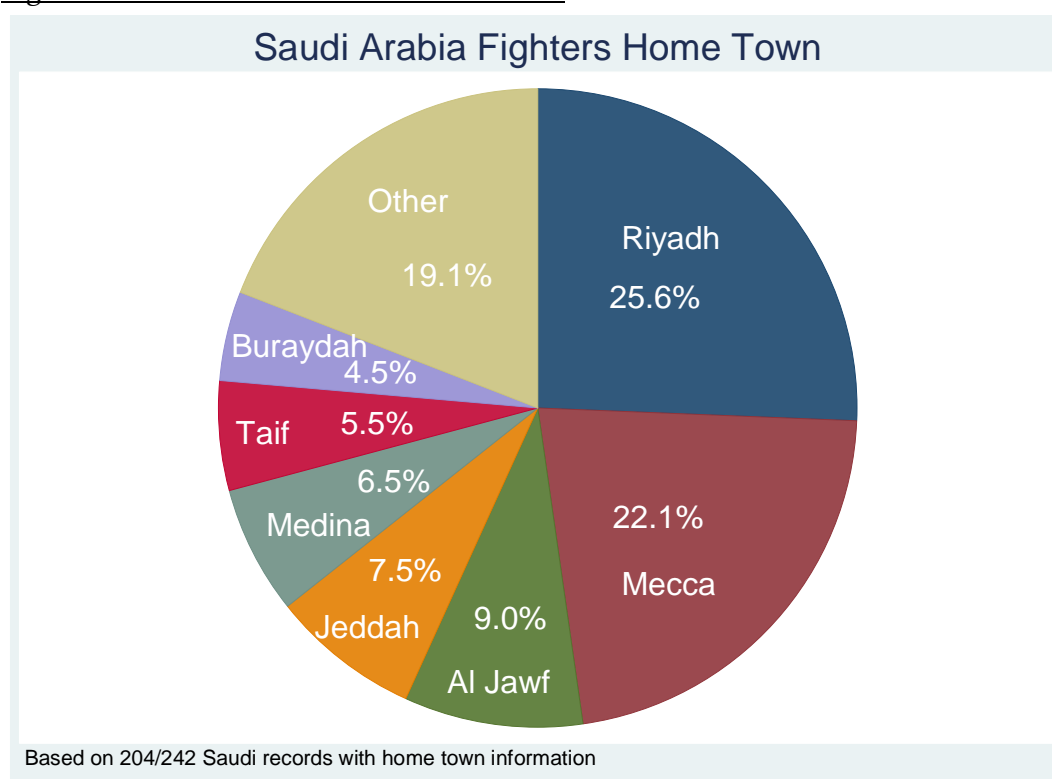
<sup>13</sup> Al-Qaeda Messaging Statistics, *IntelCenter*, September 9, 2007, online at <http://www.intelcenter.com/QMS-PUB-v3-3.pdf>

(21), and Casablanca (17). City/town of origin for Saudi Arabia, Libya, Morocco, Algeria, and Syria are broken out in greater detail below.

### Saudi Hometowns

Two hundred and five of Saudi Arabians listed in the Sinjar Records noted their hometown. Riyadh was the most common city of origin with 25.6% (51). Mecca contributed 22.1% (44), Jeddah 7.5% (15), Al-Jawf 9.0% (18), Medina 6.5% (13), Al-Ta'if 5.5% (11), and Buraydah 4.5% (9). The remaining 72 fighters hailed from towns scattered across Saudi Arabia.

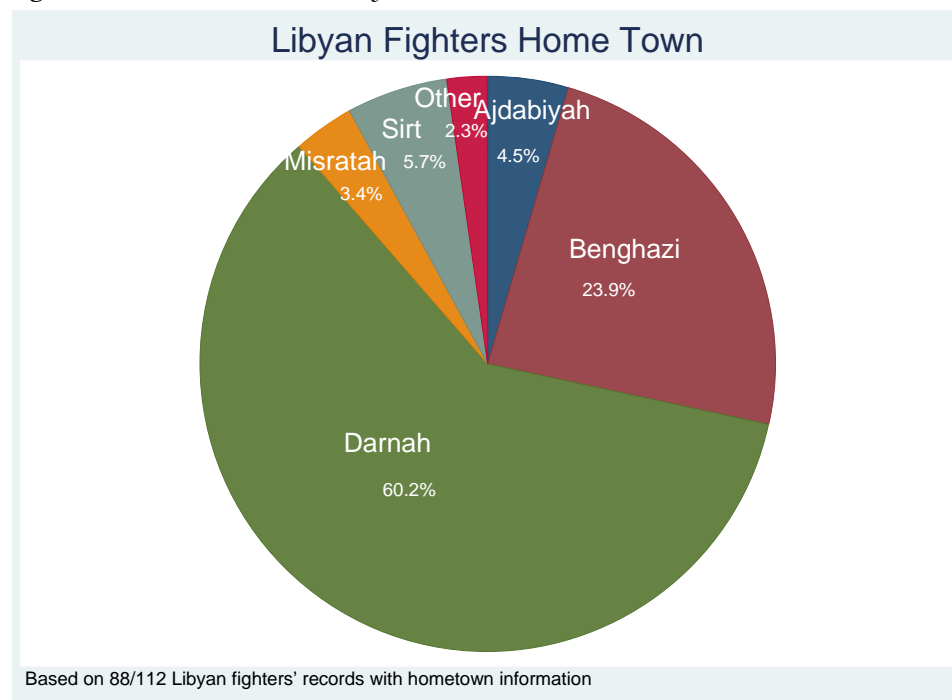
*Figure 5: Most Common Saudi Hometowns*



### Libyan Hometowns

The vast majority of Libyan fighters that included their hometown in the Sinjar Records resided in the country's Northeast, particularly the coastal cities of Darnah 60.2% (53) and Benghazi 23.9% (21).

*Figure 6: Most Common Libyan Hometowns*



Both Darnah and Benghazi have long been associated with Islamic militancy in Libya, in particular for an uprising by Islamist organizations in the mid-1990s. The Libyan government blamed the uprising on “infiltrators from the Sudan and Egypt” and one group—the Libyan Fighting Group (jama'ah al-libiyah al-muqatilah)—claimed to have Afghan veterans in its ranks.<sup>14</sup> The Libyan uprisings became extraordinarily violent. Qadhafi used helicopter gunships in Benghazi, cut telephone, electricity, and water supplies to Darnah and famously claimed that the militants “deserve to die without trial, like dogs.”<sup>15</sup>

Abu Layth al-Libi, LIFG’s Emir, reinforced Benghazi and Darnah’s importance to Libyan jihadis in his announcement that LIFG had joined al-Qa’ida, saying:

It is with the grace of God that we were hoisting the banner of jihad against this apostate regime under the leadership of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which sacrificed the elite of its sons and commanders in combating this regime whose blood was spilled on the mountains of Darnah, the streets of Benghazi, the outskirts of Tripoli, the desert of Sabha, and the sands of the beach.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Elie Austa, “Fundamentalist Unrest,” *Agence France Presse*, March 26, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> “Libya Said to Seal Off Area Following Unrest,” *Agence France Presse*, March 25, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> *As-Sahab* video released November 3, 2007, on the Al-Boraq Islamic Network; see OSC FEA20071104393586

Like other governments in the region, Libya appears concerned about the possibility of jihadi violence within its borders. In May 2007, the Libyan government arrested several Libyans on the grounds that they were planning a car bomb attack similar to an April attack in Algeria.<sup>17</sup> And in July 2007, a group calling itself al-Qa'ida in Eastern Libya announced a suicide attack in Darnah.<sup>18</sup> Libya's leader Muammar Qadhafi has taken measures to mitigate the threat from such groups, and has reportedly released over 80 Muslim Brotherhood activists in the hope that they will moderate the views of more violent Islamist activists.<sup>19</sup>

If LIFG is funneling Libyans into Iraq, it may exacerbate rumored tensions between LIFG elements over whether or not to concentrate on militant activity within Libya's borders.<sup>20</sup> Such debates are common among national jihadi movements shifting focus to global issues. This sort of debate disrupted both Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Egyptian Islamic Group in the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> Reports suggesting that LIFG's decision to join al-Qa'ida was controversial may be exaggerated, but they probably reflect a contentious debate over LIFG's future.<sup>22</sup> LIFG's support for al-Qa'ida's Iraqi affiliate has probably increased its stature in al-Qa'ida's leadership, but complicated its internal dynamics.

### **Moroccan Hometowns**

Twenty-six of the 36 Moroccan fighters (72.2%) in the Sinjar Records listed their hometown. Of those, 65.4% (17) hailed from Casablanca while another 19.2% (5) were from Tetouan. The findings are somewhat surprising because terrorism researchers have focused on Tetouan as a hotbed of recruitment for travel to Iraq. Anecdotal reports suggest this focus is appropriate, but the Sinjar Records are a reminder of the larger picture of radicalization and mobilization in Morocco.

#### Figure 7: Most Common Moroccan Hometowns

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<sup>17</sup> Kamil al-Tawil, "The Americans Launch Rocket Attack Against Abu al-Layth al-Libi in Afghanistan; Libya: Arrest of Jihadists Amid Fears of Al-Qa'ida Attacks," *Al-Hayah*, June 22, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Statement on the *Free Libya* website posted July 11, 2007, online at [www.libya-alhora.com](http://www.libya-alhora.com)

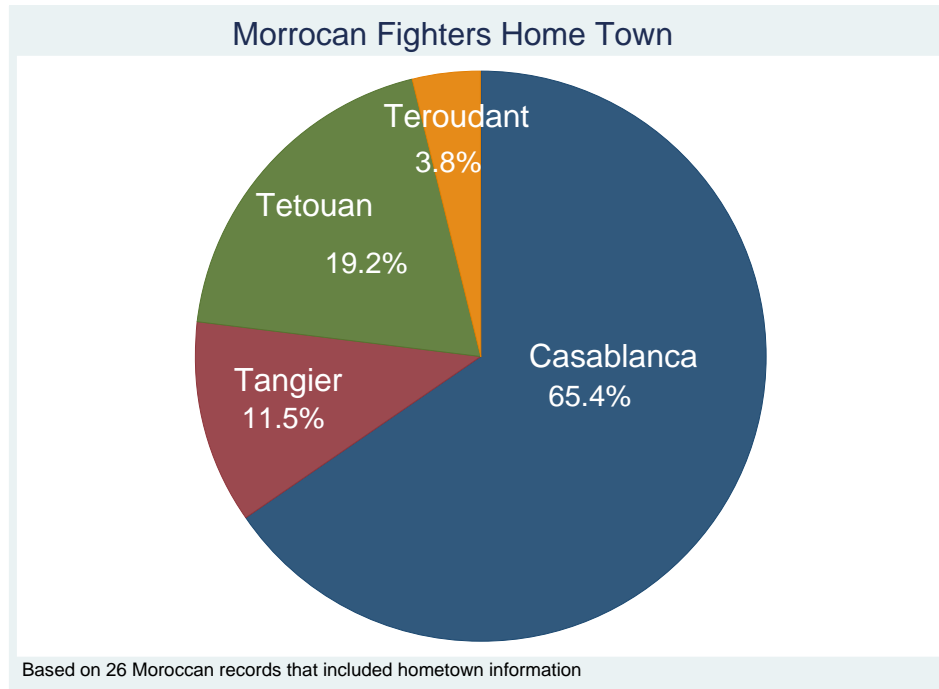
<sup>19</sup> Gianandrea Gaiani, "The Leader in Tripoli's Method's to Isolate the Islamists," *Sole-24 Ore*, March 4, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Husayn al-Harbi, "Bin Laden and Zawahiri Separated," *Al Ra'y al-Amm*, September 6, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the debate within LIFG, see Mahan Abedin's interview with Noman Benotman, available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/news\\_details.php?news\\_id=101](http://www.jamestown.org/news_details.php?news_id=101)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.; see also Sami Yousafzi and Ron Moreau, "Al-Qa'ida's Family Feud," *Newsweek*, July 30, 2007, online at <http://www.mywire.com/pubs/Newsweek/2007/07/30/4074018>

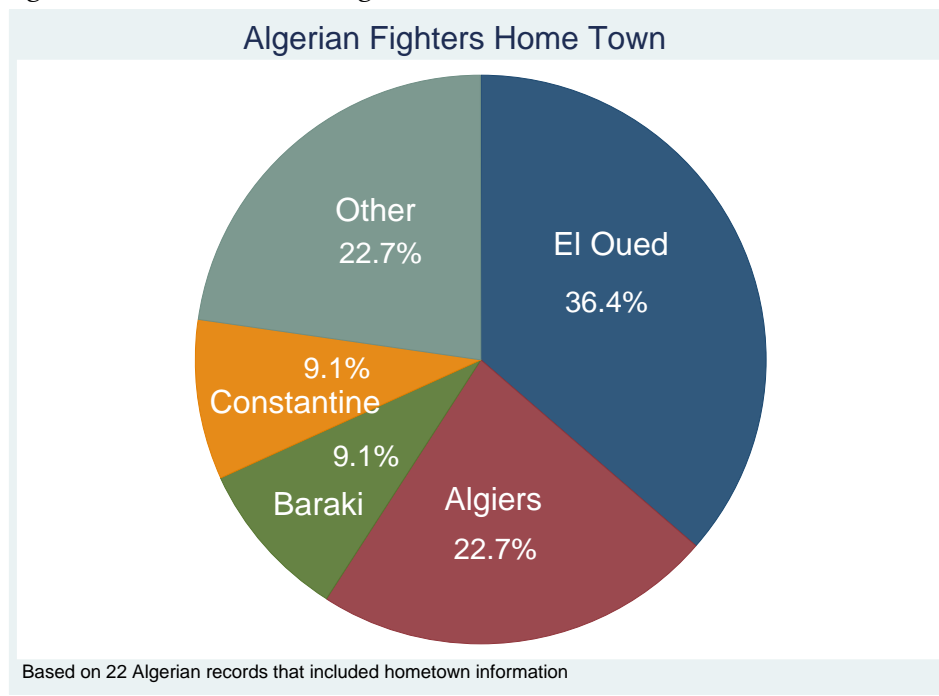
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### Algerian Hometowns

Twenty-two of 43 Algerians listed in the Sinjar Records noted their hometown. Of those, 36.4% (8) were from al-Wad and 22.7% (5) were from Algiers.

*Figure 8: Most Common Algerian*

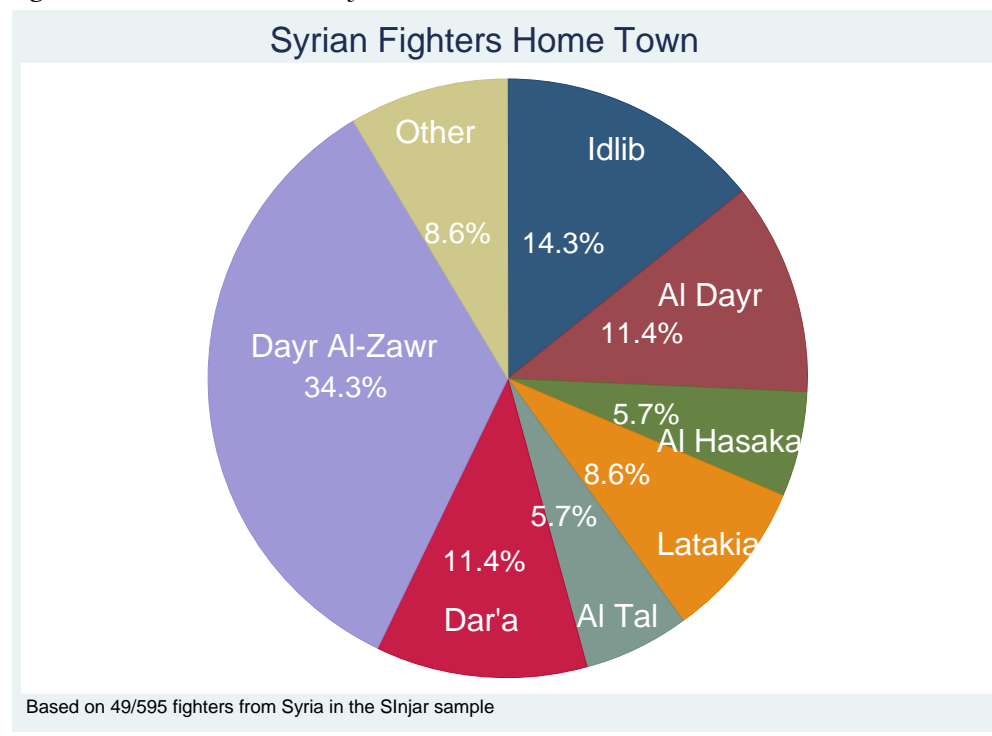


### Syrian Hometowns



Thirty-five of the 49 Syrians in the Sinjar Records listed their hometown. Syrian recruitment was widely dispersed except for Dayr al-Zawr, which accounted for 34.3% (12) of the Syrians listed. Dayr al-Zawr is the capital city of a Syrian regional state by the same name. The state borders Iraq.

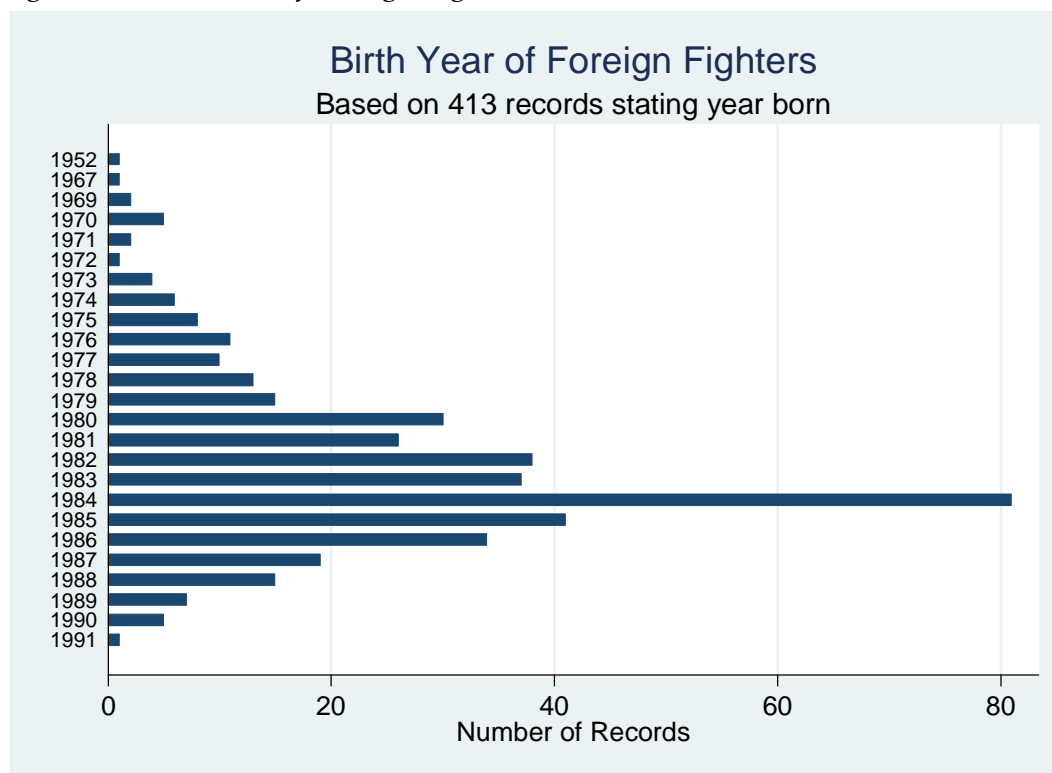
*Figure 9: Most Common Syrian Hometowns*



Age

The mean reported birth year of fighters listed in the Sinjar Records was 1982; the median was 1984. The date these fighters arrived in Syria on their way to Iraq ranged from August 18, 2006 to August 22, 2007 which indicates that the average age was 24-25 years old and the median 22-23 years old.

*Figure 10: Birth Year of Foreign Fighters*



The oldest fighter in the Sinjar Records was 54 when he crossed into Iraq. Five fighters were born in 1990 – at least one of which was still 16 when he entered Iraq.<sup>23</sup> Seven fighters were born in 1989 (16-17 years old) and fifteen in 1990 – many of whom had not yet turned 18 by the time they came to Syria. The youngest fighter in this group was Abdallah Abid Al Sulaymani from Al Ta'if, Saudi Arabia, who was born June 14, 1991 and arrived in Syria on September 23, 2006 – just three months after turning 15 years old.<sup>24</sup>

The fighters' overall youth suggests that most of these individuals are first-time volunteers rather than veterans of previous jihadi struggles. If there was a major influx of veteran jihadis into Iraq, it may have come earlier in the war. The

<sup>23</sup> Many records included birth year but not date of birth.

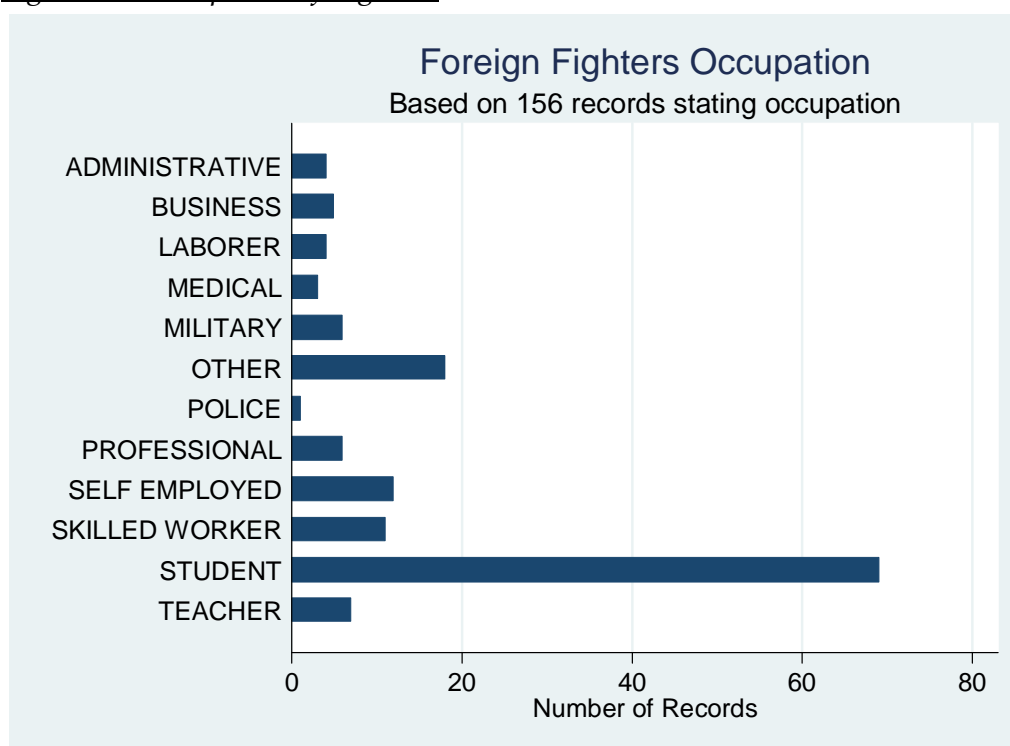
<sup>24</sup> Some records included actual date of birth, others year born, and others no data on age of the fighter. These figures are computed based on the estimated age in 2006. If fighters listed their year of birth in the Gregorian system, we counted it as January 1 of the record year. Similarly, when fighters listed their birth year as a Hijri year, we considered it the first day of the year for conversion purposes.

incitement of a new generation of jihadis to join the fight in Iraq, or plan operations elsewhere, is one of the most worrisome aspects of the ongoing fight in Iraq. The United States should not confuse gains against al-Qa'ida's Iraqi franchises as fundamental blows against the organization outside of Iraq. So long as al-Qa'ida is able to attract hundreds of young men to join its ranks, it will remain a serious threat to global security.

## Occupation

Most fighters in the Sinjar Records did not indicate their profession, but 157 of the 606 did. Of those that did, 42.6% (67) were students. The remainder varied widely. Five teachers were recorded, as well as three doctors, and four engineers. The remaining responses varied widely, from the useful (military: 5) to the bizarre (massage therapist: 1).

*Figure 11: Occupation of Fighters<sup>25</sup>*



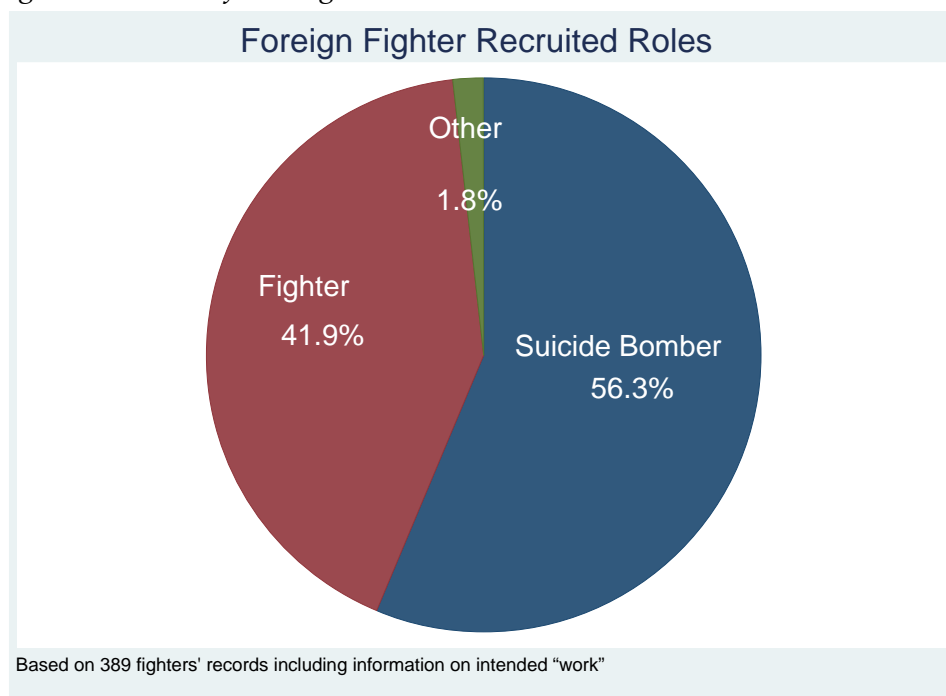
## Work

<sup>25</sup> “Student” includes high school and university, secondary school, and includes religious schools. “Teacher” includes high school, university, and religious schools. “Military” includes veterans. “Professional” includes businessman, NGO, lawyers, and engineers. “Administrative” includes clerks, judges assistants, and doctor’s assistant. “Business” includes business merchant and weapons merchant. “Other” includes free jobs, employee, artist, painter, fitness trainer, massage therapist, bombmaker, and farmer. “Skilled worker” includes carpenter, electrician, furniture maker, and welder. “Unskilled worker” includes guard and driver. “Laborer” includes work, work in a factory.

Most of the fighters entering Iraq listed their “work” upon arrival, a category that primarily distinguishes between fighters and suicide bombers.<sup>26</sup> The category seems to reflect the role fighters hoped to have upon their arrival in Iraq, but it might indicate an assignment determined by local administrators. The translated versions of the Sinjar records convert the Arabic word *istishhadi* in a variety of ways: as “martyr,” “martyrdom,” and “suicide bomber.” The word itself means “martyrdom seeker.” We have coded all such individuals “suicide bombers” in an effort to avoid confusion. Although al-Qa’ida’s ideology embraces the concept of becoming a martyr during the course of traditional military operations, the purpose of these personnel records was to enable commanders to efficiently allocate individuals for specific tasks. In such circumstances, *istishhadi* likely refers to individuals intended for suicide attacks.

Of the 389 fighters that designated their “work” in Iraq, 56.3% (217) were to be suicide bombers. Another 41.9% (166) were designated more traditional fighters. Several respondents listed more specialized tasks, including media operations (2), doctor (3), and legal skills (1). We have chosen to combine the suicide bomber and martyr data categories.

Figure 12: Work of All Fighters



<sup>26</sup> Types of work are listed in various ways in the original Arabic and in translation. Listings such as “combatant,” and “fighters,” were counted as “fighter.” Listings such as “martyr,” “martyrdom,” “suicide,” and “suicide mission” are counted as “suicide bomber.”

Numerous observers have concluded that Saudi Arabians are over-represented in the ranks of Iraqi suicide bombers. One recent study analyzed 94 suicide bombers in Iraq and determined that 44 were Saudi, 7 Kuwaiti, 7 European, six Syrian and the remainder scattered across the Mideast and North Africa.<sup>27</sup>

The Sinjar Records support the conclusion that the *plurality* of suicide bombers entering Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007 were Saudi. However, they challenge the notion that, once in Iraq, Saudi foreign fighters are more likely than their comrades from other locations to become suicide bombers. Libyan and Moroccan fighters that listed their “work” in the Sinjar Records were much more likely to register “suicide bomber” than fighters from other nations.

*Figure 13: Intended Work of Fighters by Nationality*

Country	Suicide Bombers	Fighters	Other	Total
Saudi Arabia	50.3% (76)	48.3% (73)	1.3% (2)	151
Libya	85.2% (52)	13.1% (8)	1.6% (1)	61
Morocco	91.7% (22)	8.3% (2)	0	24
Syria	65.6% (21)	31.2% (10)	3.1% (1)	32
Algeria	13.9%(5)	83.3%(30)	2.8% (1)	36
Yemen	46.1% (18)	53.9% (21)	0	39
Tunisia	41.7% (10)	58.3% (14)	0	24

Of the 244 Saudi fighters in the Sinjar Records, 61.8% (151) listed their “work.” Of that 151, 50.3% (76) planned to become suicide bombers. Among the 238 non-Saudis who listed their “work” in the Sinjar Records, 59.2% (141) were denoted as future suicide bombers. Libyan and Moroccan jihadists were far more likely, as a percentage of fighters who arrived in Iraq, to be listed as suicide bombers. Of the 112 Libyans in the Records, 54.4% (61) listed their “work.” Fully 85.2% (51) of these Libyan fighters listed “suicide bomber” as their work in Iraq.

### **Route to Iraq**

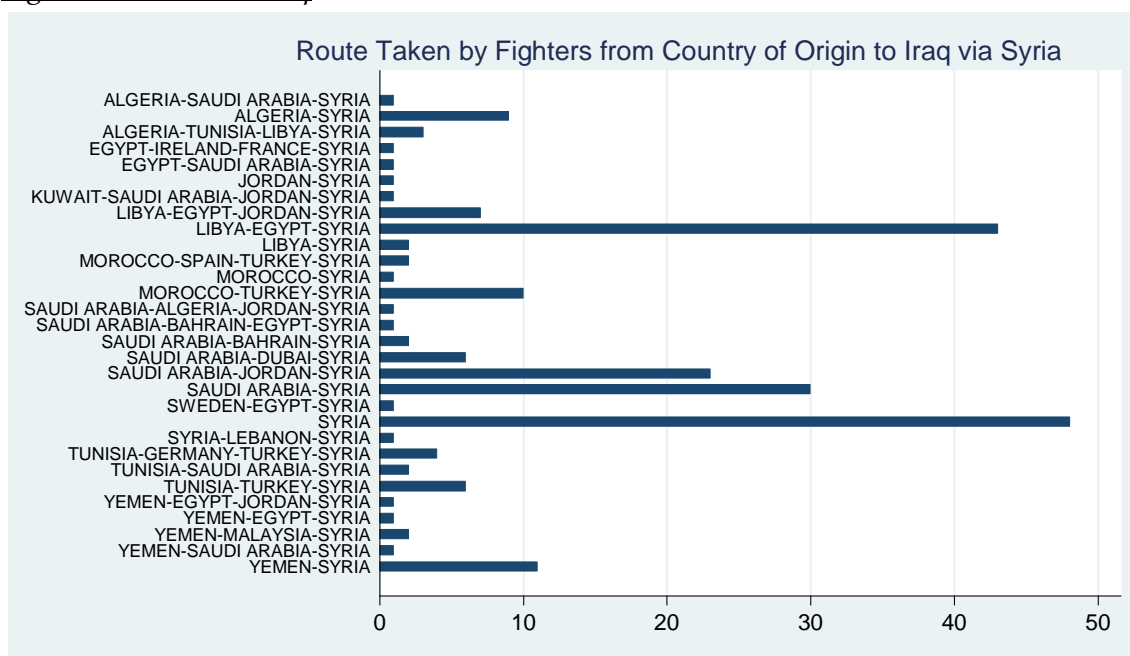
Most of the fighters in the Sinjar Records do not explain the route they took to Iraq. Furthermore, the fighters that did enter information about their route were very inconsistent in their methodology. Some fighters included their home country as a stop, others did not. Some included “Iraq” as a stop on their way to Iraq. Some fighters listed Syria as a stop on their route to Iraq, while others

<sup>27</sup> Mohammed M. Hafez, “Suicide Terrorism in Iraq: A Preliminary Assessment of the Quantitative Data and Documentary Evidence,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29:6 (2006) 616-19

seemed to think it was assumed and did not mention Syria despite providing the name of their coordinator in Syria.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, it is not clear what fighters considered a “stop.” For some, that may have simply been a country transited on the way to Iraq; for others, it may have required a more extensive layover.

Despite the data problem in assessing the route fighters took to Iraq, it is clear that routes differed dramatically from country to country. Of the 63 records of Saudis that described their route to Iraq, 47.6% listed a direct route from Saudi into Syria, while another 36.5% (23) noted that they traveled first to Jordan, then to Syria. Libyan fighters seemed to follow an established path to Syria. Of the 52 Libyan fighters that listed their route to Iraq, 50 traveled first to Egypt, while 2 flew directly to Syria. From Egypt, 84.2% (43) flew directly to Syria while 13.4% (7) went to Jordan and then entered Syria. The Sinjar Records also hint at an established pathway from Morocco through Turkey into Syria. Of the 12 Moroccan fighters that described their route to Syria, ten flew directly to Turkey while the other two crossed first into Spain before traveling to Turkey.

*Figure 14: Route to Iraq<sup>29</sup>*



The Sinjar Records do not offer much information about the fighters’ travel once in Syria. One clue may be the disproportionate number of Syrian fighters that

<sup>28</sup> An example of this is Bader Shourie, record number 90. NMEC-2007-657770.

<sup>29</sup> Figure 14, noting the routes fighters took to Iraq lists the country of origin, stopover nations, and Syria. The “Syria” category includes mostly Syrian fighters, but includes several others that only listed Syria

listed Dayr al-Zawr (34.3%) as their hometown. There is anecdotal evidence that Dayr al-Zawr was an important transit point for jihadis hoping to infiltrate Iraq, at least until 2006. A December 2005 report in *Al-Hayah* tracked a group of Algerian and Saudi fighters trying to cross from Dayr al-Zawr, through the border town of Albu Kamal, and then into Iraq.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, a young Saudi that was captured in Iraq recounted how he arrived there after using the same pathway from Dayr al-Zawr, via minibus to Albu Kamal and by foot across the border to al-Qa'im.<sup>31</sup> Abu Umar, a Palestinian fighter who crossed into Iraq to train al-Qa'ida troops also has described transiting Dayr al-Zawr on his way to al-Qa'im in Iraq.<sup>32</sup> Al-Muhajir al-Islami, a frequent poster on Syrian dissident web forums explained that the Dayr al-Zawr section of the border was particularly easy to cross because of the links between tribes on either side of the border.<sup>33</sup>

The Sinjar Records were captured far north of Albu Kamal in Syria and al-Qa'im in Iraq, which suggests that the smuggling route for fighters into Iraq has shifted north. Nonetheless, the city of Dayr al-Zawr may still be an important logistics hub for fighters hoping to enter Iraq. Dayr al-Zawr sits on the road north from Damascus and East from Aleppo, which makes it a logical location for a logistics base, whether heading further east to the Iraqi city of al-Qa'im or north to Sinjar.

## Entry Date

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<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Muqaddam, "Facts Disclosed by Fundamentalists," *Al-Hayah*, December 8, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Malfi al-Harbi, "Al-Shayi, a Victim that was Lured to Iraq," *Al-Riyad*, November 21, 2007.

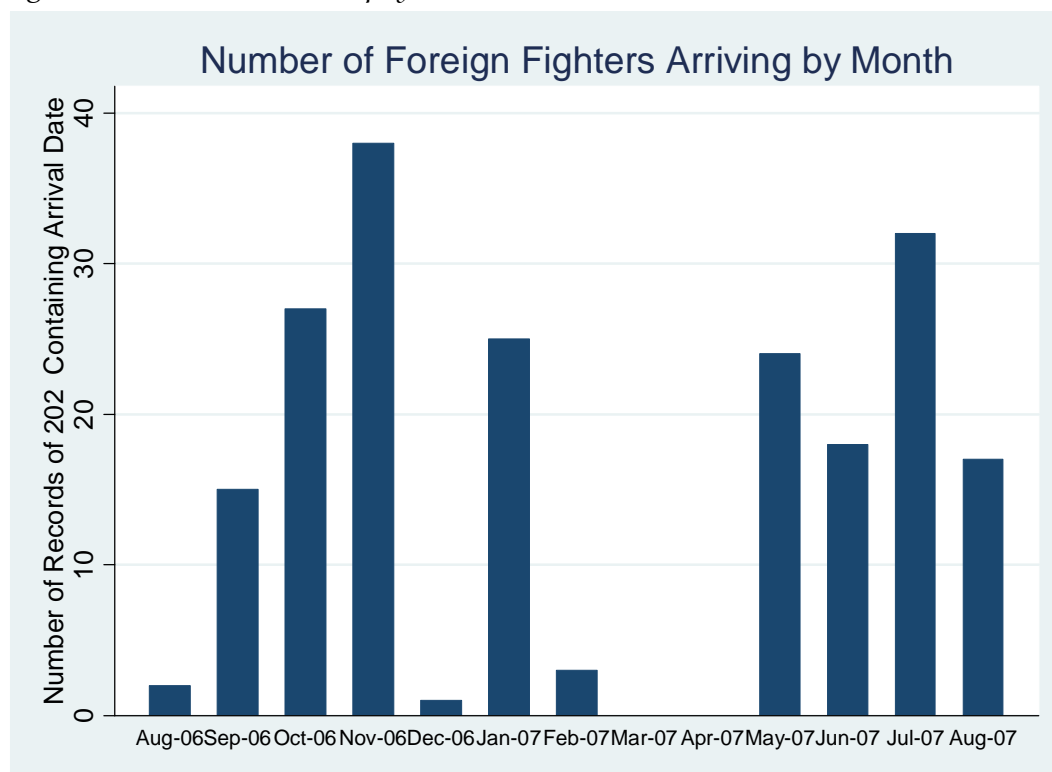
<sup>32</sup> Interview with Abu Umar, *Al Arabiyah* 1905, December 7, 2007

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0805/roadtoiraq0805.pdf> Global Terror Alert does not list the original website, but it was likely the Syrian Islamic Forum that was hosted at [www.nnuu.org](http://www.nnuu.org) during 2005.



Two hundred and three of the 606 Sinjar Records provide the date the fighter entered Iraq. The most common month to arrive was November 2006, when 38 fighters were recorded. The second busiest month was July 2007, with 32 recorded arrivals. Interestingly, in December 2006 only one fighter was recorded and it was someone named Hafid, who started his journey in Belgium.

*Figure 15: Date Entered Iraq by Month*



The Sinjar Records do not list any fighters entering Iraq in March or April 2007. This is a fascinating, but suspicious, statistic. Only 3 fighters are recorded entering in February 2007, which bolsters the notion that the ISI's logistic network was disrupted for some reason in early 2007, but it is also possible that the records for that time period were lost.

It is possible to estimate the entry date for fighters in the Sinjar Records by tracking the watermarks and letterhead on the documents themselves. The Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) was established in October 2006, which indicates that fighters recorded on ISI stationary entered Iraq after that date. Apparently, the al-Qa'ida's affiliates did not exchange their stationary immediately after the ISI was established. Some of the fighters recorded on Mujahidin Shura Council (MSC) stationary list fighters that arrived in November 2006—after the ISI had

replaced the MSC. The first fighter listed on ISI stationary is Hafid, the Belgian who arrived in December 2006. Of the 606 total records, 56.1% (340) are clearly listed as ISI recruits, while 16.8% (102) are listed on MSC stationary.

### **Traveling Partners**

The Sinjar Records do not provide much information about how individual fighters were recruited (or self-selected) for the fight in Iraq. There is interesting evidence, however, that many of the fighters signed up in groups to travel to Iraq, rather than on their own. Of the 202 fighters that recorded their date of arrival in Iraq, 46.5% (94) of them arrived on the same day as another individual from their hometown. Such evidence strongly suggests that the individuals traveled together as a group and, in some cases, may have been recruited simultaneously.

One of the larger groups began their journey in Darnah, Libya and arrived in Iraq on May 9, 2007. Abu-'Abbas, Abu al-Walid, Abu Bakar, Asad Allah, and Abu-'Abd al-Kabir all were *istishhadi*—martyrdom seekers. The five men did not sign up through the same local coordinator in Darnah. Abu-'Abbas, who listed his occupation as "Employee" signed up through a coordinator named Qamar, Abu al-Walid and Abu Bakar—a student and a traffic cop—received support from someone named Saraj. Asad Allah and Abu-'Abd al-Kabir received help from a coordinator named Bashar. Asad Allah was a teacher. None of the men knew their coordinator before they decided to go to Iraq.

It is not clear if the five men traveled together from Darnah or in separate groups, but all five went to Egypt and then to Syria. Once in Syria, the five probably were together as a group. All five listed a man named Abu 'Abbas (who they unanimously liked) as their Syrian coordinator. When the five men crossed into Iraq they each contributed several thousand Syrian Lira to the ISI, but did not report any form of ID.

### **Al-Qa'ida's Syria Problem**

The authors of this report believe that all of the fighters in the Sinjar Records entered Iraq from Syria. Most of the Sinjar Records offer evidence of transit through Syria, either because the country is listed as the final stop on the way to Iraq or because the fighter named their "Syrian Coordinator." Furthermore, Sinjar sits in Northwest Iraq approximately 10 miles from the Syrian border. In a location so close to Syria and so far from other borders, it would be surprising to find records of individuals that did not cross into Iraq from Syria.

It is not clear, however, how complicit Syria's government is in the movement of personnel through its territory. The Syrian government is led by a Ba'athist regime dominated by members of the Alawite sect, which is a form of Shi'a Islam that embraces elements similar to Christian theology.

The history of the Syrian government's relationship with alien Islamist militants is long and complicated, ranging from open support to brutal suppression of jihadi activists operating within its borders. Syrian policy toward such fighters is likely driven by its perception of national interest, rather than ideological kinship. In the late 1970s, for instance, Syria sent thousands of troops into south Lebanon in support of the PLO's guerrilla efforts there and provided logistical support to foreign volunteers who wanted to join the "jihad" on that front, yet at the same time it carried out an extremely violent campaign against the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood's uprising inside Syria, an insurgency that also included significant numbers of foreign fighters.<sup>34</sup>

Syria has an interest in keeping the U.S.-backed regime in Iraq off balance, but it must also fear a backlash from jihadi groups, many of which despise Alawite "apostasy" as much or more than the United States. Indeed, some of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's most important early recruits were veterans of the Muslim Brotherhood's uprising against the Syrian government in the 1980s.<sup>35</sup> For Syria, supporting jihadi groups is at best a double-edged sword.

Anecdotal data from Syrian history hints at Syria's strategy today. Former jihadi militant Abu'l-Walid Mustafa Hamid has described how he and a group of jihadi volunteers traveled from Abu Dhabi to south Lebanon via Syria in the early 1980s; at the Lebanese-Syrian border he and his entire group were photographed and had their passports taken to be copied by the Syrian intelligence service.<sup>36</sup> Though this action was ostensibly part of the support that the Syrians were providing to these volunteers as they made their way to Lebanon, Abu'l-Walid learned a number of years later that he and several other of the men processed by

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<sup>34</sup> For an insider's account of the Muslim Brotherhood insurgency against the Syrian government from the Harmony Database, see Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, AFGP-2002-600080 and a case study developed using this and other Harmony documents at Chapter 3 of "Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting Al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities" available at [http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/aq\\_syria.asp](http://ctc.usma.edu/aq/aq_syria.asp)

<sup>35</sup> Fu'ad Husayn, "Al-Zarqawi: The Second Generation of Al-Qa'ida," serialized in *Al Quds al-Arabi*, May 14, 2005, p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> AFGP-2002-600087, p. 17; excerpts of this source were also published by Muhammad al-Shafi'i in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* on October 26, 2006, and subsequently translated by FBIS, GMP20061026866001.

Syrian intelligence at that time were subsequently placed on Syria's terrorist watch list.<sup>37</sup>

Syria would much rather be a transit point for jihadis than their final destination. Syria's leaders may determine that an influx of fighters into Iraq supports its national interests, but Syria is certainly tracking such fighters and likely hopes that they do not survive to leave Iraq.

The Sinjar Records do offer clues about how al-Qa'ida smuggles its volunteers through Syria. Many of the fighters in the Sinjar Records listed a Syrian coordinator or coordinators that presumably directed their travel upon arrival in Syria. Of the 606 total records, 41.9% (254) listed at least one contact in Syria. Many listed multiple contacts. Given the multiple different translations and transliterations of the Syrian coordinators as well as common names likely held by more than one coordinator, it is difficult to accurately map the network of Syrian coordinators and who they helped transit into Iraq after arrival in Syria. Based on this initial assessment of the data, several named individuals are listed more frequently as the fighters' coordinator in Syria.

The fighters listed in the Sinjar Records were asked to physically describe their Syrian coordinator, divulge how much money the Syrian coordinator demanded, and rate the fighter's overall experience with the coordinator. These questions may indicate that al-Qa'ida's administrators in Iraq mistrust their Syrian coordinators. Such suspicion is common in al-Qa'ida. Numerous Harmony documents reveal al-Qa'ida's rigorous efforts to ensure its agents are using funds efficiently<sup>38</sup>.

Al-Qa'ida's challenge in coordinating transportation in Syria likely runs much deeper than minor graft. Media reports suggests that many of the human smugglers al-Qa'ida uses in Syria are freelancers working for money rather than al-Qa'ida's ideological allies, which would explain why the traveling fighters' handlers in Iraq are so concerned about their fees.<sup>39</sup> Some of these networks are

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<sup>37</sup> AFGP-2002-600087, p. 17.

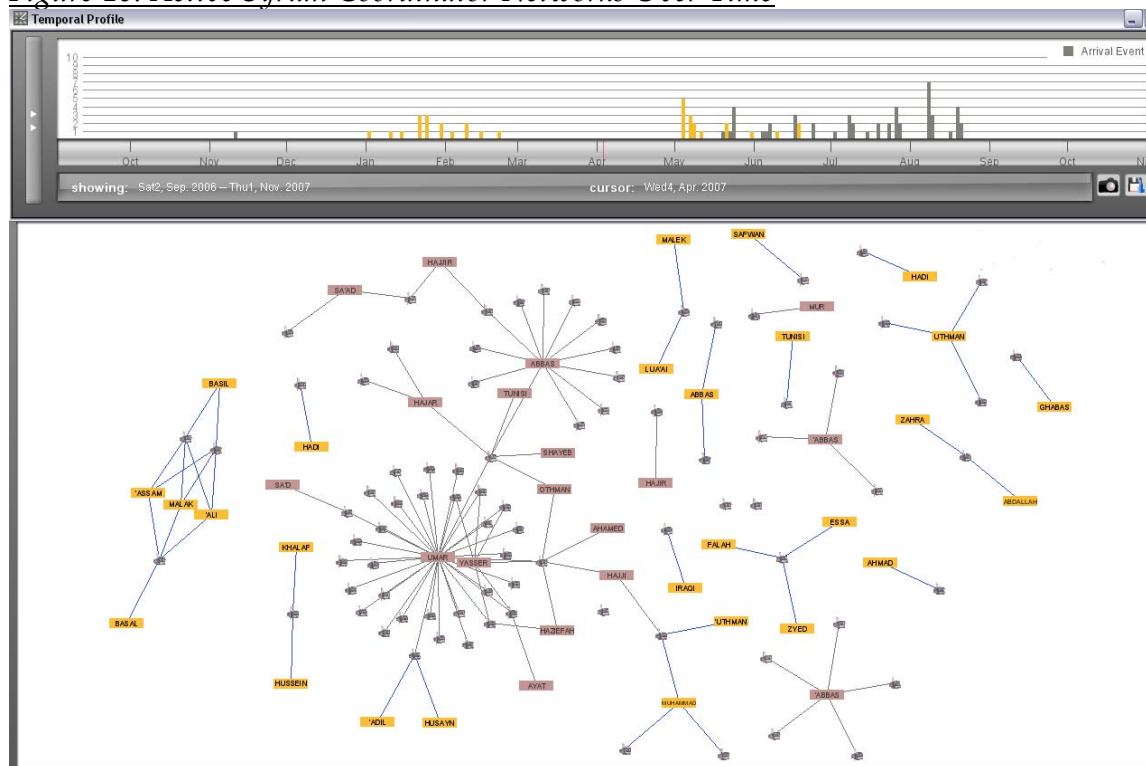
<sup>38</sup> The tradeoff's Al-Qa'ida must make when balancing security and financial efficiency are described by CTC Research Fellow Jacob Shapiro in Section I of "Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting Al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities. See [http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/harmony\\_menu.asp](http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/harmony_menu.asp) for the CTC's previous analyses of Harmony documents and a compilation of all documents released to the CTC by USSOCOM thus far.

<sup>39</sup> Hala Jaber and Ali Rafat "Suicide Bombers Head to Iraq from Damascus" *The Sunday Times* October 7, 2007

likely criminal, but others may be linked to Iraqi insurgent factions that were operated from Syria after the U.S. invasion.<sup>40</sup>

A sketch of Syrian Coordinator networks based on the limited data in this one year sample is provided at Figure 16. The core network of Syrian handlers appears to still be active with a certain Abu Umar and Abu Abbas playing key roles in coordinating foreign fighter transit through Syria. The activities of the auxiliary handlers that can be measured using this data, however, appear to be largely inactive now.

Figure 16: Active Syrian Coordinator Networks Over Time<sup>41</sup>



If al-Qa'ida's Syrian logistics networks are truly run by mercenaries, there are many policy options available to co-opt or manipulate them. It is almost inconceivable that Syrian intelligence has not already tried to penetrate these networks, but that does not preclude American agencies from attempting the same. The United States' ability to destroy networks inside of Syria is limited,

<sup>40</sup> Mu'idd Fayyad, "Interview With Major General Muhammad Abdallah al-Shahwani, director of Iraq's National Intelligence Service," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 5, 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Network analysis software was used to generate this initial sketch of the Syrian coordinator networks. The CTC's follow on report due out early next year will incorporate greater amounts of data and more sophisticated use of this powerful analytical tool.

but it may be possible to bribe or otherwise coerce such coordinators to disrupt their operations or reveal information about al-Qa'ida's organization in Iraq.

One of the persistent mysteries of the Iraq war is exactly how Islamist groups like al-Qa'ida were able to cooperate with Iraq's secular Sunni insurgents early in the insurgency period. Since early 2007, relations between al-Qa'ida's ISI and its secular counterparts have deteriorated dramatically, to the point where shootouts and assassinations between groups are now commonplace. It is conceivable that deteriorating relations between the ISI and secular insurgents have weakened the ISI's logistical chain, particularly in Syria, where Iraqi Ba'athists have strong ties.

## Conclusions

The Sinjar Records offer unrivaled insight into foreign fighters entering Iraq between August 2006 and August 2007. The data reveals several critical findings:

- Saudis made up the largest contingent of foreign fighters entering Iraq. Libyans were second (first if measured in percapita terms) and Syrians a distant third. In terms of sheer numbers, Saudis constituted the largest group of foreign fighters and contributed the most overall suicide bombers, but the percentage of Saudi fighters listed as suicide bombers was actually lower than non-Saudis.
- Recent political developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the prevalence of Libyan fighters in Iraq, and evidence of a well-established smuggling route for Libyans through Egypt, suggests that Libyan factions (primarily the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group) are increasingly important in al-Qa'ida. The Sinjar Records offer some evidence that Libyans began surging into Iraq in larger numbers beginning in May 2007. Most of the Libyan recruits came from cities in North-East Libya, an area long known for jihadi-linked militancy. Libyan fighters were much more likely than other nationalities to be listed as suicide bombers (85% for Libyans, 56% for all others).
- The Sinjar Records reinforce anecdotal accounts suggesting that al-Qa'ida's Iraqi affiliates rely on smugglers and criminals—rather than their own personnel—to funnel recruits into Iraq.

- Many of the foreign fighters entering Iraq arrived with a group from their hometown, suggesting that al-Qa'ida's recruiters try to attract groups of friends simultaneously.
- The majority of fighters that listed their occupation before traveling to Iraq were students. Universities have become a critical recruiting field for al-Qa'ida.

The Sinjar Records reveal several weaknesses that the United States and other governments can exploit:

- Al-Qa'ida's reliance on criminal and smuggling networks exposes it to the greed of mercenaries. In many cases, the United States should target work to destroy these networks, but the U.S. must remain flexible enough to recognize opportunities to co-opt, rather than simply annihilate, such systems. The U.S. may be able to use financial incentives and creative security guarantees to secure cooperation from some smugglers.<sup>42</sup>
- The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's unification with al-Qa'ida and its apparent decision to prioritize providing logistical support to the Islamic State of Iraq is likely controversial within the organization. It is likely that some LIFG factions still want to prioritize the fight against the Libyan regime, rather than the fight in Iraq. It may be possible to exacerbate schisms within LIFG, and between LIFG's leaders and al-Qa'ida's traditional Egyptian and Saudi power-base.
- The Islamic State of Iraq has failed politically because it has been unable to balance the practical demands of its local Iraqi constituency and the religious demands of its foreign supporters. The ISI's clumsy effort to balance these demands has alienated it from other Sunni insurgents. The U.S. should not be content to exploit this failure only in Iraq. The ISI's political failure exemplifies the fundamental bankruptcy of al-Qa'ida's ideology. The U.S., its allies, and moderates of all kinds, can discretely use the ISI's political failure to illustrate that larger ideological point.

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<sup>42</sup> See "Harmony and Disharmony: Exploiting Al-Qa'ida's Organizational Vulnerabilities" available at [http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/harmony\\_menu.asp](http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/harmony_menu.asp)



- The Syrian and Libyan governments share the United States' concerns about violent salafi-jihadi ideology and the violence perpetrated by its adherents. These governments, like others in the Middle East, fear violence inside their borders and would much rather radical elements go to Iraq rather than cause unrest at home. U.S. and Coalition efforts to stem the flow of fighters into Iraq will be enhanced if they address the entire logistical chain that supports the movement of these individuals—beginning in their home countries – rather than just their Syrian entry points.
- The U.S. may be able to increase cooperation from governments to stem the flow of fighters into Iraq by addressing their concerns about domestic jihadi violence.

## Appendix 1

The first study of foreign fighters in Iraq was authored in March 2005 by Israeli researcher Reuven Paz. Paz studied 154 fighters identified on jihadi web forums as having been “martyred” in Iraq and used their memorial biographies to identify their nationality.<sup>43</sup> Paz’s data break down like this:

Saudi Arabia: 94 (61%)	Algeria: 2
Syria: 16 (10.4%)	Morocco: 2 (one was living in Spain)
Iraq: 13 (8.4%)	Yemen: 2
Kuwait: 11 (7.1%)	Tunisia: 2
Jordan: 4	Palestine: 1
Lebanon: 3 (one was living in Denmark)	Dubai: 1
Libya: 2	Sudan: 1 (living in Saudi Arabia)

In June 2005, an NBC News report cited a U.S. Army official who listed the top ten countries of origin for foreign fighters in Iraq: Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.<sup>44</sup> The official would not provide the number of fighters from each country.

Several months after the Paz report was released, it was criticized by Anthony Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid of the Center for Strategic and International

<sup>43</sup> Reuven Paz, *Arab Volunteers Killed in Iraq: an Analysis*, PRISM Series on Global Jihad, No. 1/3, March 2005, online at [http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM\\_no\\_1\\_vol\\_3\\_-\\_Arabs\\_killed\\_in\\_Iraq.pdf](http://www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM_no_1_vol_3_-_Arabs_killed_in_Iraq.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Lisa Meyers, “Who are the Foreign Fighters?” *MSNBC* June 20, 2005, online at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8293410/>

Studies (CSIS) who argued that Paz overstated the Saudi presence in Iraq.<sup>45</sup> Cordesman and Obaid, whose data were provided by Saudi intelligence, claimed that there were some 3000 foreign fighters operating in Iraq, but that only 12 percent were Saudi. The Cordesman/Obaid estimates look like this:

Algeria: 600 (20%)  
Syria: 550 (18%)  
Yemen: 500 (17%)  
Sudan: 450 (15%)  
Egypt: 400 (13%)  
Saudi Arabia: 350 (12%)  
Other Countries: 150 (5%)

In December 2005, another researcher used information gleaned from online sources to assess the nationality of al-Qa'ida-linked fighters in Iraq. Citing a list of 429 slain Salafi-jihadis posted on a jihadi-linked web forum, Murad al-Shishani concluded that 53 percent were Saudi, 13 percent Syrian, 8 percent Iraqi, 5.8 percent Jordanian, 4 percent Kuwaiti and 3.8 percent Libyan.<sup>46</sup>

Citing statistics released by Multi-National Forces—Iraq in late 2005, Alan Krueger concluded that most fighters were Syrian, with Sudanese, Saudis, and Egyptians also contributing a large number of fighters. Of the 311 fighters whose nationalities were released, only seven were Libyan.<sup>47</sup>

Two years later, the Los Angeles Times cited “official U.S. military figures” stating that 45 percent of all foreign fighters in Iraq come from Saudi Arabia.<sup>48</sup> According to the article, 15 percent arrived from Lebanon and Syria and another 10 percent were from North Africa. The Los Angeles Times article also cited statistics indicating that 50 percent of all Saudis arrived in Iraq to become suicide bombers.

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<sup>45</sup> Anthony Cordesman and Nawaf Obaid, “Saudi Militants in Iraq: Assessment and Kingdom’s Response,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, September 19, 2005.

[http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/050919\\_saudimilitantsiraq.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/050919_saudimilitantsiraq.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Murad al-Shishani, “The Salafi-Jihadist Movement in Iraq: Recruitment Methods and Arab Volunteers,” *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, 3:23, December 2, 2005.

<http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369842>

<sup>47</sup> Krueger, Alan *What Makes a Terrorist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006) pp. 83

<sup>48</sup> Ned Parker, “Saudis Role in Iraq Insurgency Outlined,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2007, online at <http://fairuse.100webcustomers.com/fairenough/latimesA98.html>